

A user-friendly guide to worship at St. Alban's Episcopal Church

We are a community of pilgrims, seeking our home in the heart of our Creator. Everyone who would join us on this holy pilgrimage with Christ, for any portion of the journey, is welcome to receive nurture here.

Get Acquainted Booklet

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you are welcome to take this home with you

This booklet is offered with our heart of radical hospitality to newcomers, guests, and anyone else who might be wondering, "what's this all about?" It cannot and will not answer all your questions, but intends to let you know that every one of us was a newcomer once and we'd like you to know that we hope you find our parish to be a place where you feel valued.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

- ❖ We're *delighted* you're here, and we want you to come back.
- ❖ We suspect you might have some *questions*. Many of us had the same ones when we first arrived. Please *don't hesitate* to ask anyone.
- ❖ We want you to *be comfortable* so you can worship God and enjoy your visit today. You can't do that if you're wondering which book to pick up or trying to "do everything right." *You can't go wrong* if you do what everybody else is doing.

So...Relax...You are worshipping the God who made you out of love, so you can't get it wrong!

- ❖ If you need help, *ask* the person next to you.
- ❖ *Don't* feel as if you should do anything that makes you uncomfortable. You'll see *we don't all do everything alike*.
- ❖ If you're wondering whether you may take Communion, the answer is "*yes*." This is God's own table where we partake of the blessing of God's love in Christ. (more details will follow, but you may want to save the reading for later.)

LET'S BEGIN WITH SOME BASICS

St. Alban's was founded 26 years ago by a group of Christians who began meeting in an old beer hall in Manchaca, TX under the Rev. Malcolm Riker. Many of those founding fathers and mothers are still active parishioners. Some people who were small children at that time now worship here with children of their own.

St. Alban's began as a mission - that is, a church that was supported and governed by the Diocese of Texas. In 2004 we became a parish - that is we now support ourselves and are governed by a Vestry. Four men and one woman have served as Vicar or Rector - that is the head priest of the church.

WHO WAS SAINT ALBAN?

Alban is the first Christian in Britain whose name we know and is traditionally believed to be the first British martyr. (The word 'martyr' simply means 'witness,' though many of the early martyrs witnessed to their faith by giving their lives.) He was a Roman soldier who was converted by a Christian priest to whom he offered hospitality. This was in the year 209. When the Romans came to kill the priest, Alban switched clothes with him, giving himself to die in his place and to spare the priest's life so that he might convert others to Christ.

OUR CORE VALUES

St. Alban's is a joyful community committed to furthering the Kingdom of God. We value:

- ❖ **Inspiring worship** – praise through scripture, tradition and reason;
- ❖ **Unceasing prayer** – encouraging active, personal and community relationships with God;
- ❖ **Caring fellowship** – fostering deeper Christian relations with others;
- ❖ **Christian formation** – scripture-based learning for continual education and discernment;
- ❖ **Meaningful service** – ministering to those in need throughout our community.

OUR MISSION

We seek the transformation of lives through sharing the gifts of God's grace and love.

OUR VISION

With God's help, St. Alban's embraces the growth of our community as we invite and welcome all fellow seekers to come and worship with us. We offer a variety of opportunities for spiritual growth and diverse worship experiences, and we actively share our faith in Christ with others through service, outreach and fellowship.

WHO ARE THE MINISTERS OF THIS CHURCH?

1. **The people** are the ministers of the church. Every baptized person, no matter how old, is here to welcome you, and to accompany you on your spiritual path.
2. Our Bishop is the **Right Rev. Don Wimberly**. He is the Bishop of the Diocese of Texas, of which we are a member church. Our other Bishops are the **Right Rev. Rayford High**, and the **Right Rev. Dena Harrison**. One of these Bishops visits St. Alban's at least once a year to confirm, receive, and celebrate reaffirmation of faith.
3. Our priest is the **Rev. Margaret Waters**. Please introduce yourself to her and know that she is eager to get to know you. Her office door is always open, and she can be reached at the sites on the cover of this booklet.
4. Our Associate Rector is the **Rev. Ann Brotherton**. She was ordained to the priesthood right here at St. Alban's and will be our curate (the name for someone doing their first ordained ministry) until July 2010.
5. Our Music Director is **Dr. David Means**.
6. Our Parish Administrator is **Lisa Kittel**. She is the one to contact for just about everything and can help you get in touch with whoever you need to talk to. Call her at **282-5631** or email lisa@stalbansaustin.org.
7. Our Director of Children's and Youth Ministries is **Pam Graham**.
8. Our seminarians are **Loren Peters** and **Paula Inglehorn**. They will be helping with teaching and other ministries and learning about ministry in the parish.
9. Our Senior Warden (lay head of our board of trustees) is **Charlotte Peck**
10. Our Junior Warden (lay head of buildings and grounds) is **Yvonne Cyphers**.

WE HAVE TWO SERVICES OF HOLY EUCHARIST ON SUNDAY

- ❖ An 8:00 service with traditional language and no music
- ❖ A 10:30 service with more contemporary language and music

WHAT IS SUNDAY WORSHIP LIKE?

If you are at the 8:00 service, the bulletin gives you the page numbers to follow the service in the **Book of Common Prayer**, which is the smaller red book in the rack in front of you. There is no music at the 8:00 service, so the stuff that follows about music doesn't apply.

At the 10:30 service you will have been given a more inclusive worship bulletin. Because we know it is awkward and confusing to juggle the **Book of Common Prayer** (that's the smaller red book in the rack in front of you) and the **Hymnal** (the larger red book) and the **Songs of Worship and Praise** (the spiral bound book), we print out the service each week. Don't let us fool you - we like it simplified for ourselves, also.

The page numbers for our hymns are indicated on the right hand side of the bulletin and also on hymn boards at the front of the church. You'll notice that we like to sing, no matter how good our voices are. Please join right in!

The **lessons** for the day are printed out so you may read along silently, but if you'd prefer just to listen, that is fine, too.

Generally we **stand to sing and pray**, or we may **kneel to pray** (it's a matter of personal preference), and we **sit to listen**, except for the Gospel, when we all stand. You may do what other people are doing.

The ushers will show you when to **come forward to communion**. If you would like to receive communion, Place your hands open, with one palm on top of the other, and a wafer will be put in your hand. You may eat the wafer or hold it to dip in the wine before eating. If you have

eaten the wafer, please help the minister guide the chalice to your lips so they don't spill. And yes, we do use **real wine**. Also, gluten-free wafers are available – just ask the minister.

If you would prefer to receive a **blessing** rather than communion, the minister will know it if you cross your arms across your chest.

It is up to **parents** to decide when their children begin to take communion. Holy Communion is a mystery that we can all appreciate no matter where we are on our faith journey.

Before the service begins, we will have some **music** to help us make the transition from our hurried lives to this sacred time we have come to be with God. This is a good time to **be present and quiet**.

The priest will come forward to **welcome our guests** and to offer **blessings** to anyone who is celebrating a **birthday** or **wedding anniversary**. Please come forward if this means you! These people kneel in front of the altar rail, and a prayer is offered over them by everyone. You are invited to read along in your bulletin. We offer a **prayer of hospitality** as well to make **everyone** feel welcomed in God's home.

As we sing the first hymn, the **procession** will begin, led by the cross. These young people are called **acolytes**, and they help with the service. If the **choir** is present, they process as well. Other **ministers** will be helping with the readings and the communion. There may be a **seminarian** or two. These are people who are preparing to be priests. The **priest** will be the last person, unless a **Bishop** is present.

The priest will offer some **prayers**, and then we'll usually sing a hymn to the **glory of God**. If this is unfamiliar, you can find it in the front of the hymnal (its number is preceded by an 'S' and the bulletin tells you the number.) You'll catch on in a couple of weeks. The **collect** is the special prayer for the day. If you listen carefully (it is printed in the bulletin) you'll probably hear hints of what the lessons are going to be about.

Then we all sit down except for the person who reads the **lessons**.

In our church we read a lot from the **Bible** every week: a portion of the **Old Testament**; a **psalm** (which we sometimes sing); a portion of the **New Testament**; and a portion of the **Holy Gospel**. The priest reads this.

Then the priest or a seminarian or a guest preacher will give the **sermon**. The sermon is supposed to be an interpretation of one of the readings of scripture in such a way that we understand it as being relevant to our own lives. **The business of the church is the transformation of lives.**

We hope that the sermon will remind us of how much God loves us and what a great gift it was for God to become incarnate in Jesus Christ, who offers us his body and blood in Holy Communion. This is how we become the **body of Christ**.

In the Episcopal Church our sermons usually last between 12 minutes and 20 minutes. If you would like to read the sermon from this week or past weeks, they are usually on the website by midweek.

After the sermon, we say the **Nicene Creed**. It begins with the words, "We believe..." These have been the guiding beliefs of all Christians since the 4th Century. To believe does not mean so much subscribing to facts in our brains as it does to claiming that **these truths guide how we live our lives**.

Then a minister will stand and say the **prayers of the people**. You will see places where you may speak the names of people who are ill or who have died, and also a place where you may speak up and thank God for your blessings. Some people speak right up and others whisper or say the names silently in their hearts. God hears all these prayers.

We may say a **confession of sin**. We are all sinners, even though we try to follow God's way and not our own. When we confess and the priest blesses us with the absolution, this is the symbol of Christ's

having made us worthy through his life, death, and resurrection to come forward and take our place at the table.

Following the **absolution**, we may say a prayer or two, then we all stand and the priest says, **"The peace of the Lord be always with you,"** and we answer, loud and clear, **"And also with you."** This is a very ancient greeting that brings us all together as brothers and sisters in Christ. Even if you don't know everybody, now we are family and we'll come together to the Feast of Thanksgiving to God. People shake hands or hug (do whatever is comfortable for you) and say, "The peace of the Lord," or "Peace be with you." The answer is "And also with you."

Sometimes people get carried away with the Peace, and it takes them a while to settle back down. This really isn't the time to catch up on the week's news, but a time to welcome each other. (Usually we have to wait for the choir's hug-a-thon to end!)

The priest will stand and say some words to remind us that **all our blessings come from God** and it is appropriate for us to **return a portion of what we have been given to God.**

The reason we give money to God is to make our hearts closer to God by experiencing **gratitude** for all we have been given. The reason to be generous is not to pay the bills but to **grow our own souls**, even though we will never be even the tiniest bit as generous as God has been to us.

You'll notice that some people don't put money in the plate. That doesn't mean they are being stingy, but probably that they are **very generous** and give to the church in the form of a **pledge**, which is a sacrificial gift often paid in the form of a check sent regularly to the church office.

If you **join our church** (and we hope you will!) you will be asked to **make a pledge**. It is one of the ways in which we feel a strong sense of belonging. It is a very important way in which we grow in our spiritual lives.

There will be music during the **offering**, usually sung by the choir. You will have noticed by now that for a relatively small church we have a superb organist and choir. It's OK to look at them and smile.

During all of this, the priest has been setting the table for our **holy meal**. We use the **best** of everything -- freshly pressed linens and shining silver. Our bread is usually small wafers and we do use real port wine because Jesus used wine. If you would prefer to take only the bread or only the wine, that is fine and you will have had communion.

The priest will **bless the gifts of the people** and then begin the **Eucharistic Prayer**. Eucharist is the Greek word (the whole New Testament was written in Greek) for **Thanksgiving** and is another way of saying Holy Communion.

We believe that during this prayer, some of which may be sung, the Holy Spirit enters into the bread and wine and makes them holy, so that when we eat and drink them, that **holiness enters into us**. When we go back into the world, we are the hands and voices of Christ today.

People come forward and receive communion, then wait in their seats until everybody is done. We usually sing hymns during this time. The priest will lead us all in a prayer to thank God for the gift of Holy Eucharist, and then the priest will give a **blessing**.

This is the blessing we use most of the time:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and give you grace.

Grace not to sell yourself short.

Grace to risk something big for something good.

Grace to remember that the world is now too dangerous for anything but truth,

and too small for anything but love.

So may God take your minds and think through them.

May God take your lips and speak through them.

May God take your hands and work through them.

May God take your hearts and set them on fire. Amen.

We come to church so that we may serve Christ in the world, and this is our charge to take it seriously. **You are important to God.**

Then the ministers process out to a hymn and the priest dismisses us. In this parish we say "Alleluia! Alleluia!" except during Lent.

The 8:00 service usually takes just under an hour, and the 10:30 service usually takes about an hour and 15 minutes.

Following the 8:00 service some people usually go over into the Parish Life Building for **coffee and Adult Christian Formation**, which starts at 9:30. (More about that later.) People who will be worshipping at 10:30 will join us, so this is a very good time to **get to know people** as well as to learn something.

Following the 10:30 service, lots of us go over for **Coffee Hour**. Each week two families host a light buffet and we gather for fellowship. We hope you will join us and let us get to know you.

I'VE NOTICED THAT SOME PEOPLE ARE DOING UNUSUAL THINGS, LIKE BOWING AND CROSSING THEMSELVES. WHAT IS THAT ABOUT?

Gestures such as bowing when the cross passes by, at the mention of Jesus' name, and when approaching the altar, or making the sign of the cross over one's chest are matters of personal piety. They mean a lot to some people, but not to everybody. They are ways people acknowledge the special holiness of a moment or some words. You are free to observe them or not, as you like.

WHAT ELSE GOES ON ON SUNDAYS? PLENTY!!!

Our **nursery** opens at 9:15 and welcomes children up to 3 years old in a cheerful and clean room stocked with lots of new, clean toys. The nursery is staffed by people who are professional child care givers and who are trained and have had extensive background checks. **Your children are safe here, and if they need you, someone will come get you quickly.**

Christian Formation is how we continue to **grow into our life in Christ**, no matter how old we are! Everyone is welcome, no matter where you are on your spiritual journey. There are no dumb questions except for the ones you don't ask. Invariably, when somebody says, "I've always wondered..." or "I've never understood..." there is a sigh of relief from the other people who haven't dared to admit to something they don't know.

Children ages 3-5th grade come to church with their parents. They may sit with their family or in the front pew with Miss Pam. When we sing the Gloria, they follow the cross to children's chapel and Sunday School.

Children ages 3-Kindergarten enjoy **Godly Play**. This is where they learn stories of the Bible through their own sense of wonder and awe. They have a good time and learn to love God and Jesus.

Children who are in 1st through 5th grade go to **Workshop Rotation**. Every month they work with one Bible story, and depending upon which week it is, they will experience it through art, drama, science, cooking, games, or computers. The children say this is "awesome," and we are all impressed with how much they have learned through fun.

All of these children remain in their classrooms for the first part of the service. They will be brought to the church in time to **join their families for Holy Communion**.

Youth in 6th through 12th grades gather in the Youth Room at 9:30 for Christian fellowship and learning. Programs are chosen to engage these young people and to be pertinent to their lives. They come to church at 10:30.

EYC means Episcopal Youth Community and is how our young people experience Christian fellowship and serve the church and the world. They gather at various times to do service projects, worship together, and just have fun! They have their own webpage at stalbansyouth.org.

Every time there is a 5th Sunday in the month, the Youth are the ministers for our 10:30 worship, have lunch together, and then go lead a worship service at a nursing home.

Often the Youth do special things as well. They might go all together to give a birthday party to homeless children in a shelter or help in a food pantry. At Christmas they cook and serve a dinner for the parish and on Shrove Tuesday they host the Pancake Supper and talent show. Sometimes they just have fun - a lock-in, movie night, or a trip to a water-park.

All of the volunteers and staff members who work with children and youth have been trained in "Safeguarding God's Children" and have had extensive criminal background checks. Your children and youth are safe with us!

WHAT IF I'M NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH?

Lots of people aren't. Let us introduce ourselves.

"Episcopal" comes from the Greek word "episcopos," which means "bishop." We are a church with bishops, but some other churches are, too.

We are the American Church that is affiliated with the Church of England or Anglican Church. Our worship is shaped by the **Book of Common Prayer**, which was first written in 1549 in England. It has been revised many times and in many countries.

Like our ancestor, the Roman Catholic Church, we take our **sacraments** very seriously. These are baptism, Holy Eucharist, confirmation, marriage, ordination, reconciliation of a penitent, and holy unction. We believe that something truly holy happens when the Holy Spirit enters into ordinary substances such as water, bread, wine, and oil. If your background is Roman Catholic, you will find our service to be very familiar to you.

Like our cousins, the Protestants, we do not recognize the authority of the Pope, and we believe the preaching of the **Word** to be of very high value.

You may have noticed by now that our priest is a woman. Women have been ordained as priests in our church since the 1970's. Both men and women serve at the altar as readers and Eucharistic ministers. Please let us know if you would like to do this.

What do Episcopalians believe? We are a **credal church** and not a confessional church. That means that we tolerate a broad spectrum of personal belief, though our fundamental beliefs are articulated in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. What we mean when we say those words together may vary from person to person, but what is ultimately important to us is that **we worship together**. You do not have to sign a correct confession of faith to belong to our church. The fact that you want to worship with us tells us you feel **you belong here**.

The Episcopal Church is a very tolerant church. We are a church for people who are not afraid of questions. **Our God is a mystery**, whom we know deeply in relationship, but about whom we know we will never know everything. **God continues to reveal Godself to us as we grow in our spiritual lives.**

HOW DO I JOIN THE CHURCH?

- ❖ If you have been a member of another Episcopal church, let the priest know, and we will ask for your letter of transfer to be sent.
- ❖ If you have been baptized by water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in another Christian denomination, you simply need to tell the priest that you would like to join, and you will be made a member. The next time the Bishop visits, you may choose to be received into the Episcopal Church.
- ❖ If you have not been baptized, please let the priest know, and we will prepare you for baptism, when you will be welcomed into the Christian family by the whole congregation.
- ❖ Every year, before the Bishop comes to visit us, we will offer **Discover Classes**. These classes take several weeks and provide extensive education about the Episcopal Church.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME IF I BECOME A MEMBER?

- ❖ That you will attend church on Sundays when you are healthy and in town
- ❖ That you will participate in prayer and some sort of spiritual formation
- ❖ That you will express your commitment to Christ at St. Alban's by making a financial pledge

ST. ALBAN'S IS A VERY BUSY PARISH!

The best ways to keep up with things is by visiting our website: www.stalbansaustin.org or asking to receive our newsletter, *The Almanac*. We send the newsletter and notices via e-mail, so get us your e-mail address or let us know how to contact you if you don't have one.

We have many ministries to belong to. They are small groups of people who gather to study or to serve or just to have a good time as Christian friends. You are welcome to join any of them. Here are just a few:

- ❖ **Eucharistic ministers and lectors** – these are the laypeople who are trained to read the lessons and to assist in the Eucharist
- ❖ **Choir** – these people are dedicated but not professional singers who lead us all in raising a joyful noise.
- ❖ **Daughters of the King** – this is an order of laywomen who accept a rule of life and serve the Rector and the parish in prayer and devotion.
- ❖ **Community of Hope** – a true community, inspired by the Rule of Benedict, who are trained to be lay chaplains. They assist the Rector in providing pastoral care to the parish and beyond.
- ❖ **Brotherhood of St. Andrew** – this men's group gathers regularly for Bible study, service projects, and amazing barbecue!
- ❖ **Bible study** – a group meets Thursday at 9:30 just about every week. Just come on in! No previous knowledge required.
- ❖ **Education for Ministry** – This class starts every year in the Fall. It offers theological education for laypeople.
- ❖ Other study and fellowship groups gather from time to time

We know you still have many questions.

Please feel free to ask.

But, above all, know that we are blessed to have you worship with us.